

'Thank you' for signing pledge

by **Greg Nothstine**

The Alaska Federation of Natives Sobriety Movement (AFNSM) would like to thank everyone (Native and non-Native alike) who took the "sobriety pledge" at the recently held Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, all 1,944 of them!

Since its inception in 1992, AFNSM has been encouraging everyone to take the Sobriety Pledge. The pledge itself is an oath people take to claim the goals of AFNSM. By adding and signing their names to a sobriety pledge sign-up sheet, much like a petition, people agree to claim AFNSM's goals and for sobriety to begin with them. The pledge states:

As an Alaska Native or Concerned Individual, I do hereby claim the goals of the AFN Sobriety Movement as my own: "1) To encourage and support alcohol-free and drug-free Alaska Native families; 2) To encourage the practice of traditional Native values and

activities; 3) To cooperate and support existing groups working to promote sobriety among Alaska Natives; 4) To encourage the formation of sobriety groups in every Alaska Native community; 5) To encourage and support sober Alaska Native leaders and role models." If we, Alaska Natives or Concerned Individuals, are to remain a healthy distinct nation it will be because I took a stand against the elements which weaken and destroy our values, our languages and our spirits. If our spirits are to remain strong and sober, it has to begin somewhere. Let it begin with me!

In 1993, ten thousand signatures were collected for the sobriety pledge, and later given to veteran sled dog musher, Mike Williams, to carry in his sled in the last great race, the (March '94) Iditarod Sled Dog Race. The sobriety pledge signatures which are being collected throughout 1994 and in the months of January and Febru-

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ary '95 will be carried in the Iditarod Sled Dog Race in March 1995.

Like the origin and history of the last great race, where serum was successfully relayed to Nome by dog team (just in time to cure the diphtheria

epidemic) in the late 1920's, the Sobriety Pledge signatures symbolically represent the serum of "commitment" that is necessary to cure the devastating effects of alcohol and drugs.

For the last 59 years, "sobriety" has been a central theme of 12-step re-

cover programs, particularly Alcoholics Anonymous. It is important to recognize now, that although millions of people may have first become familiar with the term "sobriety" through 12-step programs, it has gone beyond these circles and become a universal expression. Anymore, and in varying degrees, sobriety is used to refer to a way of life; that is, abstinence coupled with personal development (spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically).

Creating awareness and appreciation for sobriety's merits and all that it brings to people, communities and the broader society, has been one of AFN Sobriety Movement's aims; also, one of its greatest challenges. For some reason, "sobriety" has raised the anxiety level in a lot of people. This is changing. Today, more people and organizations openly and publicly approve of and support sobriety. This is shown by the thousands of people who have signed the AFNSM Sobriety Pledge and by the numerous organizations (50 and growing) that have become AFNSM Charter Groups & Honor Societies. The latest organizations to join AFNSM as a Charter Group or Honor Society are: Alaskan's for Drug-Free Youth (statewide); Shishmaref Sobriety Club; Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and the St. Paul Island Student Council.

Four Worlds Development Project of Canada identified four fundamental principles to healthy community development which are necessary before successful community healing can begin, they are: 1) A vision is needed (no vision, no development); 2) Development starts from within...; 3) Personal development and Community development go hand-in-hand (one cannot exist without the other); and 4) A great learning enterprise is

required. If someone were to chart Alaska Native people's progress, as it relates to the sobriety movement in Alaska, they would see that it parallels the four basic principles just outlined.

For at least a decade, Alaska Natives have lamented the lack of information and materials that could "culturally and philosophically" approach the prevention of substance abuse. The AFNSM, in cooperation with ARCO Alaska, Alaska native Healthy Board and the Indian Health Service, have just released a resource manual called "Helping Sobriety Happen."

Fifteen-hundred (1,500) resource manuals were made. Of those manuals, 400 are being distributed through AFNSM's office. The remaining 1,100 manuals are being distributed through the clearing house of the Alaska Council on the Prevention of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (Alaska Council). Service providers interested in receiving the manual can do so by calling the Alaska Council at 257-6021 or 1-800-478-7738.

Breaking the cycles of dependence was a common theme at the AFN Convention '94. Under the banner of sobriety, with common goals and a common vision, Alaska Natives are breaking the cycle of dependence on alcohol which has entrapped them. Wilson Justin, AFNSM chairman, perhaps said it best at the opening ceremonies of the AFN Convention, in a speech he dedicated to Native elders, he stated, "We are not out to save one person. That's not our job. Our job is to stand for our values and our people. We stand for the fact that we are past the survival stage ... sometime down the road, we will stand as one people and we look across the ocean as one people and say, 'We are free at last.'"